

Creating a Web-Based Employee Orientation and Induction Program



By Stephen P. Covert, Ph.D.

Even in the best of economic conditions, school district leaders look for ways to operate more efficiently and provide enhanced or improved services to employees. In today's economy, this search has become a necessity, and providing services to existing employees, as well as prospective employees and retirees, can be a challenge.

All employees—current, prospective, and retiring—want their personnel questions answered quickly. They expect “on-demand” access to resources and information. Large groups of new employees, sitting in an impersonal room, faced with speaker after speaker talking to them about forms that they may not understand or ever have to complete, can be overwhelming and ineffective.

Technology can help school business officials and human resource personnel meet and exceed expectations by tailoring orientation and induction programs to provide a more personalized and unique experience.

A Web-based employee orientation program saves time, resources, and money.

Before implementing a Web-based orientation program, Spotsylvania County (Virginia) Schools held 20–24 orientation sessions throughout the year. Each session consisted of three or four human resources staff members helping a large group of employees complete the mass of paperwork required to verify employment eligibility, federal and state tax forms, central registry and I-9 forms, health insurance and flexible spending account documents, direct deposit forms, and retirement paperwork.

The orientation sessions also included presentations about the employee handbook, Fair Labor Standards Act regulations, school board policies, and receipt of and compliance with the acceptable use policy for access to technology in the schools.

A critical part of this process was to reach a common understanding about what the final product and orientation experience would be capable of providing to all new employees.

Quantifying the labor hours and investment in human capital these three-hour sessions represented conservatively ranged from \$7,305 to \$8,766 per year in personnel costs alone. When combined with the costs of paper, printing, and additional personnel who may participate in orientation sessions, such as tax shelter annuity vendors, the investment easily surpassed \$10,000 per year.

Jumping In

In the fall of 2009, Spotsylvania County Schools implemented a Web-based online orientation and induction program to provide better, more efficient services to newly hired employees and to provide a more cost-effective method of sharing resources, information, and answers to frequently asked questions.

While gathering information about existing online, Web-based employee orientation programs, Spotsylvania County Schools' implementation team discovered that the existing programs were typically hosted by hospitals, large corporations, or universities. The team visited many sites and surveyed them using a rubric that evaluated (a) ease of usability, (b) informational completeness, (c) consistency of the orientation Website with overall organizational Web design, (d) software/hardware used to create the site, and (e) applicability to their school division's mission.

The implementation team took special care to investigate the software and hardware that might be needed to create and host their own online new employee orientation and induction program.

Ultimately, the goal was to have this Web-based orientation program effectively articulate the school board's and the community's passion for educational excellence and their drive for providing a 21st-century education to prepare all students to excel in a global, dynamic society.

In the planning phase of the project development, the implementation team collaborated with personnel from the finance department, instruction department, and technology department. A critical part of this process was to reach a common understanding about what the final product and orientation experience would be capable of providing to all new employees.

After a thorough survey, the implementation team decided to use a Windows-based platform with PowerPoint to design and input the information needed for the presentation. The implementation team wanted audio and video in the presentation, and used Audacity to record the sound to accompany the informational slides.

Each department provided text relevant to the orientation and induction topic; the text was read aloud and recorded. For example, for the orientation slide that reviewed instructions for completing the federal I-9 form, personnel from the human resources department drafted and edited the script for the reader to record. For information regarding tax forms from the state and federal government, finance department personnel collaborated on the text for the slides that addressed those forms.

From conception to implementation, the team was able to research, plan, collaborate, design, and implement the new online program over the course of approximately four months. The most time-consuming component of the project was recording the audio to accompany the informational slides.

Personalizing the Process

New employees to Spotsylvania County Schools can now access the Web-based online orientation and induction program from the privacy and comfort of their home, the library, a park, a coffee shop, or the human resources office. All the necessary forms for successfully processing a newly approved employee are included in the orientation program, with special directions and explanations for those forms that must be notarized or signed in the presence of a human resources official.

A popular characteristic of the Web-based program is the user's ability to stop the presentation at any time, resume when convenient, and replay a specific slide in the presentation. Also, new employees may complete

and print all the documents at home or complete them in the human resources office.

All employee groups can use the orientation program, including support staff, administrators, teachers, and retirees.

All employee groups can use the orientation program. Newly hired administrators, bus drivers, maintenance engineers, teachers, paraeducators, and technology systems analysts all access the online program as they are inducted into the organization. Also included in the presentation and Website are resources for retirees and those who otherwise separate from service.

Moving Forward

The next phase in developing this Web-based online orientation and induction program will involve collaborating with the technology department to develop a series

of simple questions or interrogatories at the end of the orientation presentation. These questions will solicit the required basic personal information of the new employee and then prepopulate all the necessary forms without the new employee having to repeatedly click and fill the forms with standard information. (No identifiable information, including Social Security number or date of birth, is cached in the program or site.)

In creating a unique user experience that accomplishes the many diverse goals of a Web-based online orientation and induction program, Spotsylvania County Schools not only provides newly approved employees a fast, convenient way to complete the required documentation to join the organization, but also ensures a more cost-effective approach to service delivery. Such personalized and customizable user experiences are part of the new 21st-century challenge and represent an exciting opportunity to rethink how school districts consistently meet employees' needs.

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